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Flatbush Town Hall
35 Snyder Avenue
Brooklyn
New York City
Kings County
New York

HABS No. NY-332

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

CITY HALL PROJECT

Name: Flatbush Town Hall

Location: 35 Snyder Avenue, Brooklyn, New York City, Kings County, New York

Present owner, occupant, use: Owned by the City of New York, Vacant.

Significance: The Flatbush Town Hall, a handsome Victorian Gothic structure, is one of the best of its type in New York City. Built in 1875, it is a tangible symbol of civic government in Flatbush in the period before it was annexed by the City of Brooklyn. Polychromatic materials, pointed-arch openings, and a corner tower are all distinctive features of the building.

I. Historical Information

A. Physical history

1. Date of erection: 1875. Flatbush Board of Improvement procures enactment of a law authorizing a town hall - May 18, 1874 (Chap. 456 of Laws of 1874 of the State of New York). Stone plaque on tower of building states "Erected A.D. 1875." Buildings transferred to Town of Flatbush by Board of Improvement at a public meeting on February 7, 1876.
2. Architect: John Y. Cuyler. According to Stiles (p. 238), Cuyler was engaged by the Board of Improvement. John Yapp Cuyler (dates unknown) trained as an engineer. He is best known for his work on the construction of Prospect Park in Brooklyn. No other buildings by him are known.
3. Builder, contractor, suppliers: William Vause was the contractor.
4. Original plans and construction: The location of original plans is unknown. Early views of the building may be found in the collection of the Long Island Historical Society. The exterior remains unchanged.
5. Alterations and additions: An addition for the Homicide Court was constructed at the rear of the building in 1929-30. Built of brown brick, it has large round-arched windows.

B. Historical Context

Flatbush Town Hall was built in response to an 1873 annexation attempt by the City of Brooklyn. After the proposal to annex the Town of Flatbush to the City of Brooklyn was defeated in an election, the local papers began agitating for a town hall to hold village court sessions, town elections, and other public meetings.

The building served multiple purposes as a police headquarters and a seat of local court. The second floor ballroom was the site of social and cultural functions. When Flatbush was annexed by Brooklyn in 1894, the town hall became the police precinct headquarters and also the site of the 7th District Magistrates Court. The police moved to new headquarters in 1924 leaving only the Homicide Court in the town hall. However, the Police Department returned to the town hall in 1926. The 67th Police Precinct utilized the building until the fall of 1972 when it moved to new quarters. The building remains vacant, although plans have been put forward to convert the building to a neighborhood cultural center.

II. Architectural Information

A. Description of Exterior: Flatbush Town Hall, approximately 145 by 45 feet in dimension, is a two-and-a-half story building above a raised basement. The three-bay front is dominated by a tower placed at the southwest corner of the building. The side elevations are punctuated by projecting gabled sections at the middle and rear. The roof is a steep hip and is now covered with asphalt shingles. The exterior masonry bearing walls are faced with red brick with contrasting buff stone detail. Wooden horizontal beams support the floor loads. A rusticated granite base extends in front of the building to create an open terrace which has a limestone balustrade.

B. Description of Interior: The first floor is subdivided into offices. A wooden staircase leads to the second floor where a large ballroom has been retained. The ceilings are covered by pressed metal.

C. Site: The building faces south. Immediately to the west is a small court building. A large parking lot is to the east.

III. Sources of Information

A. Architectural Drawings: location unknown.

B. Early Views: Early photographs may be found in the collection of the Long Island Historical Society.

C. Bibliography

1. Primary sources: Deeds - King's County Register's Office

2. Secondary sources

Snyder, John J. Tales of Old Flatbush. Brooklyn, 1945.

Stiles, Henry R. (ed.) The Civil, Political, Professional and Ecclesiastical History of the County of Kings. New York: W.W. Munsell & Co., 1884.

Vanderbilt, Gertrude Lefferts. The Social History of Flatbush. Brooklyn: Frederick Loeser & Co., 1909 (orig. publ. 1881).

Prepared by Marjorie Pearson
Director of Research
Landmarks Preservation Commission,
City of New York
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N.B. ARCHITECT'S RENOVATION REPORT (1981) INCLUDED IN
H.A.B.S. FIELD RECORDS.